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Religious Education in Non-Religious Schools: A Comparative Study of Pakistan and Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT *In both Pakistan and Bangladesh, most parents seek to provide their children with a 'hybrid' education, combining both religious and non-religious components (simultaneously). In Pakistan, however, the so-called 'non-religious' side of this education – for example, in government and non-elite private schools – tends to be associated with a particular understanding of religion, one that remains persistently apprehensive about the treatment of and, in many ways, even the acknowledgement of, religious, sectarian, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. Keeping this in mind, scholars and policy makers with an interest in the relationship between education and citizenship – particularly insofar as this relationship is tied to the challenge of cultural diversity – would do well to focus more of their attention on competing expressions of 'religion' in the context of (ostensibly) 'non-religious' schools.*

Introduction

The literature regarding education in Pakistan and Bangladesh and, more specifically, the literature relating religious education, is dominated by three ideas, each of which deserves closer scrutiny. The first idea maintains that, faced with an expanding range of educational options, the parents of school-aged children are not expected to prefer the education provided in the context of their local *madrasa*; instead, they are expected to 'prefer' the curricula associated with 'non-religious' (that is, government or private) schools. The second idea maintains that these *government* and *private schools* are, in fact,

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'non-religious' schools. And of course, the third, coming closer to some of the existing literature regarding education and constructions of modern citizenship, maintains that, more often than not, 'religious' education is tied to specific patterns of religious and political 'exclusion' or 'intolerance'.

Again, all three of these ideas deserve closer scrutiny. In fact, as the remainder of this article will explain in some detail, there are at least three ways in which the existing literature regarding religious education in Pakistan and Bangladesh could be (and should be) restructured.

First and foremost, the distinction between religious and non-religious education, in which the former (religious education) tends to be associated with local *madrasas*, whereas the latter (non-religious education) is tied to specific government and private schools, is simply impossible to sustain. In fact a closer look reveals that the 'religious' side of a (so-called) 'non-religious' government or private school education is impossible to avoid. In Pakistan, for instance, government and private school textbooks designed to facilitate the study of Urdu, as a *language*, have been shaped by an extraordinary and persistent influx of explicitly *religious* content. In Bangladesh, questions of 'community' in the context of existing history and social science textbooks are frequently addressed in terms of diverse expressions of 'religious' identity. And of course, in both countries, religious studies (for example, Islamic Studies) has emerged as a *compulsory* part of the curriculum in almost every local school. Indeed, the terms of a modern 'non-religious' government or private school education are, in many ways, unmistakably 'religious' terms.

Even apart from the content of existing curricula, however, there is a second way in which the existing literature must be re-examined and, in many ways, substantially revised. This emerges at the level of existing enrolment patterns and, more specifically, the question of school 'choice'. As a general rule, parents in Pakistan and Bangladesh do not choose just one type of education for their children – religious or non-religious. Instead, they choose both. Some children are specifically selected for their local *madrasa*, even as their siblings are sent to a local government (or private) school. But, more often than not, each child is sent to a local *maktab* (mosque school) or *madrasa* early in the morning before proceeding to another school for the remainder of his or her 'regular' school day. A growing number of elite parents, however, seeking to avoid a visit to the *madrasa* altogether, simply call the *mullah* from their local *madrasa* to teach their children at home. In fact, a closer look reveals that *most children receive both types of education – religious and non-religious – simultaneously (on a 'part-time' basis)*. And, more often than not, they tend to encounter this religious/non-religious mix in more than one local school: religious and non-religious subjects in the context of their local *madrasa*; religious and non-religious subjects in the context of their government or private school; and so on.

In this article, the education provided in local *madrasas* will be set aside in favour of a closer look at the education provided in the context of local government and private schools. In particular, an attempt will be made to shift the focus away from local *madrasas* in order to show that, when it comes to primary and secondary education in Pakistan and Bangladesh, ongoing efforts to move 'away from the local *madrasa*' do not, in any way, amount to a move away from 'religion'.

In fact, coming to the third way in which the existing literature could be, and should be, restructured, the challenge appears to lie in grappling with what might be called the 'religious' side of a modern 'non-religious' education. What is the content of this religious/non-religious education? And, ultimately, how is this hybrid education tied to enduring questions regarding the boundaries of 'community' and the terms of modern 'citizenship'? Knowing, as we do, that existing curricula may be used to promote exclusionary political objectives – including, as the public sector curricula developed by India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2001 clearly reveal, *exclusionary objectives targeting specific religious communities* (in this case, Indian Muslims) – how is a modern religious/non-religious education tied to the cultivation of specific forms of religious or political 'intolerance'? (See Mukherjee & Mukherjee, 2001; Hasan, 2002; for historical background, see Rudolph & Rudolph, 1983). Do 'non-religious' government and private sector schools play any part in the cultivation of 'religious' intolerance? And, if so, how? Are 'religious' curricula inherently or inevitably 'intolerant'?

In what follows, part one will focus on the relationship between religious and non-religious education at the level of existing enrolment patterns (who studies where?). Part two will take up the question of curricular content (who studies what?), focusing, specifically, on the question of religious intolerance. If religious education is, to all intents and purposes, a ubiquitous feature of the existing educational landscape – albeit, having said this, one that emerges in many *different* forms – how might we begin to understand the relationship between religious education, on the one hand, and intolerance, on the other, in Pakistan and Bangladesh? Which schools (and, more specifically, which curricula) are associated with constructions of community-based intolerance? Which schools/which curricula are not? These are the questions I will take up and address below.

Who Studies Where?

For years, scholars and policy makers believed that parents in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and many other Muslim-majority countries were driven to enrol their children in local *madrasas* 'against their better judgment'. In particular, they argued that rampant poverty and the poor quality of existing

government schools left local parents with 'no other choice' (see Houtsonen, 1994; see also Horvatich, 1994).

Increasingly, however, this view is being revisited (Houtsonen, 1994; Horvatich, 1994). In fact, across the board, parents in Pakistan and Bangladesh have been shown to favour some form of religious education for their children – rich parents, poor parents, educated parents, illiterate parents, Sunni, Shi'a, and so on (see Nelson, 2006). Indeed, as one report compiled by the European Commission pointed out, with specific reference to Pakistan, 'many rich parents in urban areas where secular schools are easily accessible [continue to] send their children to local *madrasas*' (see Mercer et al., 2005:18).

Moreover, the report went on to explain that these parents seem to incorporate their local *madrasa* as just one among several different religious options, options that include (a) religious education on a full-time (residential) basis, (b) religious education on a full-time (non-residential) basis, (c) part-time enrolments (morning), (d) part-time enrolments (evening), and so on. In fact, as noted above, even those who steadfastly refuse to send their children to a local *maktab* or *madrasa* routinely call the *mullah* from their local *madrasa* to teach their children at home.[1] And, yet, even apart from the local *mullah*, the local *maktab*, or the local *madrasa*, the report explained, most children encountered some form of religious education in the context of their local government or private school as well – public schools, private schools, elite residential boarding schools, and so on.

What follows is an attempt to illuminate these rather diverse patterns of religious education in greater detail, first in Pakistan and then in Bangladesh.

Who Studies Where? Pakistan

Throughout South Asia, the number of children enrolled full-time (that is, exclusively) in the context of their local *madrasa* remains extremely small. Fortunately, two studies sponsored by the World Bank have drawn attention to separate-but-related aspects of this fact. Both were completed by Tahir Andrabi, Jishnu Das and Asim Ijaz Khwaja, and both sought to shed new light on the shape of the existing educational enrolments (religious *and* non-religious) in Pakistan.

The first study, completed in 2005, drew attention to the fact that full-time residential enrolments in the context of Pakistani *madrasas* are much smaller than many were previously inclined to expect, amounting to less than 1 per cent of the total student population (see Andrabi *et al.*, 2005). In fact, the research presented below largely reinforces this finding, drawing special attention to the ways in which, throughout Pakistan, existing enrolment patterns in the context of local religious schools (for example, local *maktabs* and *madrasas*) are not 'full-time' patterns but rather 'part-time' patterns.

The second study, completed in 2006, moved away from the question of religious education to show that a growing number of children – including poor children – had begun to receive their 'non-religious' education in the context of local *private* schools (see Andrabi *et al.*, 2006). Whereas the first study sought to show that most children do not receive a *madrasa*-based 'religious' education (exclusively), but rather some type of 'mixed' education, the second study sought to flesh out the second half of the same equation: *madrasa*-based religious education . . . *mixed with what*?

Here, Andrabi and his colleagues drew attention to the parameters of a gradual shift away from local government schools toward local private schools. And, again, the research presented below largely bears this out, drawing attention to the fact that, throughout Pakistan, parents are faced with three basic options for their children's 'mixed' (religious/non-religious) education, and, *within these three options*, a growing number have chosen to *reject* Option B – that is, government schools (below) – in favour of some combination of Options A and C.

A	B	C
maktab/madrasa	government school	**private school**

What Andrabi and his colleagues sought to highlight was, of course, the expanding role of 'market forces' in the context of local school 'choices' and, within this, the underlying importance of local consumer 'demands' (see Nelson, 2006; see also Government of Pakistan, 2006: 28–29). These demands are neither exclusively secular nor exclusively religious. On the contrary, as my own previous work has shown in some detail, these demands represent an increasingly common 'hybrid'.

In Pakistan, this hybrid educational space emerges, quite clearly, from an account of two sets of data – one concerning the nature of existing enrolment patterns and one concerning the nature of existing curricula. The former was facilitated, in the context of the research presented here, by a set of more than 300 interviews (N = 331) conducted in eight separate districts throughout Pakistan during the spring of 2007 (Table 1).[2]

Within these interviews – approximately 40 interviews per district, stratified in terms of education, income, and sectarian affiliation – three questions were particularly important. The first asked local parents to explain what sort of education they sought to provide for their children. Did they seek to provide a 'religious' education (only), a 'non-religious' education (only), or a 'mixed' education? Approximately 1 per cent of the respondents noted that their children did not receive any education at all. But, apart from this – and, of course, in keeping with the underlying thrust of the argument presented here – 93 per cent explained that their children were provided with a 'mixed' education.

Table 1. Pakistan sample

Districts	*Punjab* ... Lahore, Sialkot, Okara, Jhang	
	NWFP ... Peshawar, Dera Ismail Khan	
	Sindh ... Karachi, Larkana	
Household income	Less than Rs. 2,499 per month	10.0 (% of the sample)
	Rs. 2,500–4,999	26.0
	Rs. 5,000–9,999	27.0
	Rs. 10,000–19,999	24.0
	More than Rs. 20,000	13.0
Education	No education at all	13.0 (%)
	Religious education (only)	1.5
	Some elementary education	26.5
	Some intermedicate education	29.0
	Some university education	30.0
Sect/Sub-sect	Sunni (Deobandi)	32.0 (%)
	Sunni (Barelwi)	30.0
	Sunni (Ahl-e-Hadith)	4.0
	Shi'a (Ithna Ashari)	12.0
	Other	2.0
	No response	19.0[a]

[a]This 'no response' category is tied to those who, in an effort to 'overcome' the problem of sectarian difference, said: 'I am neither Sunni nor Shi'a; I am only Muslim.'

The second and third questions sought to determine exactly how this mixed education was constructed, first in terms of 'religious' institutions (*maktabs*, *madrasas*, home schooling with local *mullahs*, and so on) and, second, in terms of 'non-religious' government and private schools. Again, in keeping with the data presented by Andrabi *et al.* (2005), our data revealed that only 1.2 per cent of the respondents had boys enrolled in the context of their local *madrasa* on a full-time residential basis. (The corresponding figure for girls was 0.9 per cent.) Another 3–4 per cent, however, had children enrolled on a full-time *non-residential* basis (3.3 per cent boys; 3.6 per cent girls), bringing the total number of those with children enrolled in their local *madrasa* on a full-time basis to 4.5 per cent.

The most common category, by far, however, drew attention to those with children enrolled in their local *maktab* or *madrasa* on a part-time basis: 64.5 per cent boys; 57 per cent girls. In fact, when combined with those who chose to call the local *mullah* – typically, the *mullah* from their local *madrasa* – to teach their children at home (25.5 per cent boys; 23 per cent girls), *part-time* enrolments captured the dominant trend amongst 85–90 per cent of all respondents.

Initially, turning to the question of 'non-religious' public and private school education, the data revealed that just 1 per cent had sons in enrolled in elite residential English-medium 'private' schools, with the term 'elite' referring

to schools charging more than Rs. 20,000/month. (The corresponding figure for daughters was 0.5 per cent.) Another 2 per cent, however, appeared to enrol their children in elite *non-residential* English-medium private schools – 2 per cent boys; 2 per cent girls – bringing the total number with children enrolled in elite English-medium private schools (even in the context of our comparatively 'elite' sample) to roughly 3 per cent. A slightly larger number chose to enrol their children in 'mid-range' English-medium private schools (10.5 per cent boys; 7 per cent girls) charging Rs. 2,500–19,999/month. But the largest number, by far, appeared to enrol their children in the most inexpensive private schools (39 per cent boys; 32 per cent girls) charging Rs. 500–2,499/month (Table 2).

This was, of course, an important discovery. And, for the most part, it reinforced the data collected by Andrabi and his colleagues from the World Bank (2006), showing that, throughout Pakistan, *private schools were no longer the exclusive domain of the very rich.* And yet, at the level of basic enrolment patterns, the larger trend had become almost impossible to ignore: boys *and* girls in Pakistan tend to receive a *hybrid* (religious/non-religious) education – one that remains more common for boys than it does for girls, particularly at the secondary-school level – and yet, increasingly, *both* boys *and* girls appear to receive a hybrid education that attempts to combine (a) the *part-time* study of religion with (b) the services of local *private* schools.

Who Studies Where? Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, the situation is similar in many respects – particularly when it comes to the 'part-time' study of religion. But, at the same time, the situation in Bangladesh also reveals a number of important differences (Table 3).[3]

The data for this portion of the study emerged from a series of more than 100 personal interviews (N = 122) and, within these interviews, three questions were (once again) particularly important. The first of these three questions revealed that most families seek to provide their children with a 'hybrid' religious/non-religious education; in fact, 85 per cent of our sample explained that their children were enrolled in a 'mix' of religious *and* non-religious schools.

The second and third questions, however, began to reveal exactly how this hybrid education was constructed – first, in terms of local religious schools,

Table 2. Government v. private school enrolment estimates: Pakistan

Pakistan (boys):	55.5% private v. 33.0% government
Pakistan (girls):	43.0% private v. 31.5% government

Table 3. Bangladesh sample

Districts	Dhaka, Khulna, Rangpur, Chittagong	
Household income	Less than Tk. 2,499 per month	15.6 (% of the sample)
	Tk. 2,500–4,999	30.3
	Tk. 5,000–9,999	35.2
	Tk. 10,000–19,999	12.3
	More than Tk. 20,000	6.6
Education	No education	12.3 (%)
	Religious education (only)	3.3
	Some elementary education	50.4
	Some intermediate education	18.0
	Some university education	15.5

and then in terms of (so-called) 'non-religious' schools. Here again, although our sample was composed of Muslims at a rate of more than 97 per cent (despite the fact that Bangladesh has a non-Muslim minority population of at least 10–15 per cent), it emerged that very few of our respondents had any boys (or girls) enrolled in their local *alia* (government-sponsored) or *qawmi* (independent) *madrasa* on a *full-time* basis: 19 per cent boys; 5 per cent girls. In fact, the most common pattern involved those with children enrolled in their local *maktab* or *madrasa* on a *part-time* basis: 48 per cent boys; 61 per cent girls. Indeed, when combined with those who chose to call a local *mullah* to teach their children at home (17 per cent boys; 18 per cent girls), part-time religious enrolments appeared to be associated with nearly 75 per cent of all respondents.

Data regarding non-religious public and private school enrolments emerged from the Education Watch dataset as outlined in the recent work of Pataporn Sukontamarn (2006). These sources revealed that, in a significant departure from the trends prevailing in Pakistan, most of the primary school students in Bangladesh are still enrolled in local *government* schools (approximately 68 per cent). In fact, private school enrolments appear to account for just one in four children, with the most inexpensive private schools – both English-medium and Bangla-medium – accounting for the largest portion of this group.

In addition to these inexpensive private schools, however, it is important to note that, in Bangladesh, many students are enrolled in a set of inexpensive schools known as 'informal' schools (see Sukontamarn, 2006: 5). These NGO-based schools, accounting for approximately 8 per cent of the total primary school enrolment in Bangladesh, cater to relatively marginalised students – for example, working students – with flexible schedules, specialised curricula, and, in some cases, extremely innovative teaching materials.[4]

The basic point, however, lies in realising that, although existing trends in Pakistan and Bangladesh appear to exhibit broad similarities, particularly

when it comes to the expanding reach of local private schools, the current situation is not identical. In Pakistan, *private* school enrolments have begun to outstrip those in local government schools, whereas, in Bangladesh, *government* schools continue to educate a clear majority.

Who Studies What?

The content-based significance of recent efforts to privilege the private sector and, following on from these efforts, the underlying political significance of expanding private sector enrolments, particularly in Pakistan, has, however, been extremely difficult to determine. This difficulty persists because the underlying terms of the *curriculum* (as reflected in the use of a particular set of textbooks) remains almost *exactly the same* across a wide range of government *and* private schools. In fact, with the exception of just a few very elite English-medium private schools focused on GCSE and 'A-level' exams, a closer look reveals that *both government and private schools throughout Pakistan use more or less exactly the same textbooks*.

Typically, those with an interest in the implications of existing 'curricula' for the content of local 'politics' draw attention to the fact that, when it comes to the question of curricular content, 'public' and 'private' schools tend to differ. In fact, scholars routinely go out of their way to note that *some* community members shift their affiliation away from the public sector towards the private sector precisely *because* they want to provide their children with access to an alternative community grounded in an alternative and, in some sense, a more appealing curriculum (see, for example, Peshkin, 1986; see also Schneider *et al.*, 2002: 238–260; Smith & Meier, 1995: 64–79). In Pakistan, however, this assumption is not supported by the evidence. In fact, in Pakistan we seem to encounter a case in which local efforts to move away from 'public' to 'private sector' schools cannot be described in terms of any effort to access alternative curricula. On the contrary, as noted above, the curricula in both types of schools tend to remain almost exactly the same. Indeed the difference, one might argue, between public and private sector schools in Pakistan is not defined in terms of curricular content (or expressions of community). Instead, it is defined – with only a few (extremely elite) exceptions – in terms of funding structures, financial management, and facilities.

Throughout Pakistan, major changes at the level of existing enrolment patterns (public $\rightarrow$ private) have had very little impact when it comes to specific questions of curricular content. Indeed, increasing private sector enrolments are important, but the question arises: increasing enrolments for what? *What do students learn?*

This question has received a great deal of attention in the context of local *madrasas*. But, in recent years, few have attempted to answer this question in the context of local government and private schools (exceptions include: Saigol, 1994; 2000; Ahmad, 2004; Aziz, 2004; Nayyar & Salim, 2004). What follows is an attempt to correct this imbalance, focusing, specifically, on the question of public and private sector curricular content as it relates to the question of religious education, identity, and intolerance – first in Pakistan and then in Bangladesh.

Who Studies What? Pakistan

The terms of a given curriculum are, of course, never *synonymous* with the content of existing textbooks. In fact, the content of specific textbooks should never be conflated with a complete account of what students (actually) learn in school. But, even so, *some understanding of local textbooks can be extremely helpful when it comes to illuminating broad thematic trends* (Government of Pakistan, 2006: 15–16).

In his book, *Denizens of Alien Worlds* (2004), Tariq Rahman draws a distinction between three types of schools in Pakistan. These three types of schools are described (below) as A, B, and C (Figure 1).[5] Rahman, for his part, does not recognize the possibility of significant qualitative variations *within* each of these three categories – for example, *within* Category C: C1, C2, and C3. But his argument *does* appear to illuminate several important distinctions at the level of existing curricula *if*, one might argue, two rather specific adjustments are made.

First, the category 'government school' (that is, Category B) must be taken to mean (a) government schools (Category B) *and* (b) most Urdu and English-medium private schools (Categories C1 and C2). Indeed, given the fact that the students enrolled in these schools typically encounter more or less *exactly the same government-sanctioned curricular content* (*en route* to the same government-sponsored exams) any effort to trace out the pedagogical (and political) implications of *different curricula* must be prepared to take this basic qualitative *similarity* into account.

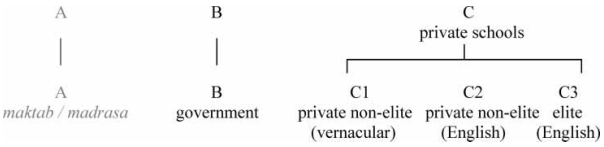

Figure 1. A typology of schools in Pakistan

Second, the category 'private school' in Rahman's analysis must be limited to the most elite English-medium private schools – that is, those schools that seek to prepare their students for a series of well-known international exams, the most important of which are the GCSE and 'A-level' exams (Category C3).

If these rather important two adjustments are made, Rahman's argument does in fact appear to illuminate important differences between, for instance, the curricula (and textbooks) used in Category B/C1/C2 and those used in Category C3 (Figure 2). Indeed, these are the content-based curricular faultlines that exist in Pakistan today (see Government of Pakistan, 2006: 17, 29).

The differences between these two categories appear on many levels, from faculty to financial management. But the most important differences are not limited to questions of faculty or financing. In fact the most important differences are related to the question of *content* – particularly when it comes to the relationship between curricular *content* and the question of religious or political *intolerance*. Indeed, a closer look reveals that the basic difference between Category B/C1/C2 and Category C3 appears in the form of radically different approaches to underlying questions of *difference*, *diversity*, and *pluralism*.

Initially, and without careful reflection, this difference might appear to illuminate a case of lower-middle-class 'intolerance' (for example in the context of local government schools) versus the 'tolerance' often associated with elite 'secular' schools. Research conducted over the course of the last five years, involving more than 1,000 personal interviews combined with a painstaking review of several hundred local textbooks, however, reveals that this view is not entirely correct.[6] In fact, the difference between these two groups is not related to the question of 'tolerance' or 'intolerance' *per se*. Instead, it is related to what might be described as competing approaches to the question of 'difference' itself and, more specifically, competing approaches to the question of difference, or pluralism, as it relates to the underlying question of 'equality' (see also Nelson, 2008).

In Pakistan, government school students and those from *non-elite* English-medium private schools (that is, Category B/C1/C2) are exposed to a notion

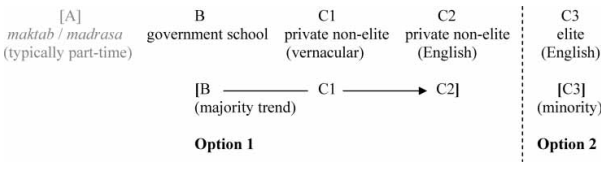

Figure 2. Current enrolment trends (B → C2) and curricular options (option 1 v. option 2) in Pakistan

of 'equality' in which the substance of equality itself is defined in terms of 'similarity', 'homogeneity', and 'unity'. 'If everyone is *united*/If everyone is *exactly the same*', they're told, 'everyone is (by definition) *equal*'. 'Homogeneity', if you will, is a *synonym* for 'equality'.

In fact, as the remainder of this article will explain, this notion of equality-as-homogeneity is really quite ubiquitous in the context of local government schools. And for the most part this attachment to the terms of 'unity' as 'conformity' tends to be articulated with specific reference to (a) the unity of Islam and, in due course, (b) the unity of the nation as a whole. Here, good Muslims are defined as good citizens, good citizens are defined as good Muslims, and so on. The unity of Islam, in turn, is not introduced as an expression of unity that seeks to encompass the extraordinary 'diversity' of God's creation. Instead, this unity is understood as an expression of unity that seeks to 'overcome' diversity 'for the sake of the nation' and, ultimately, 'for the sake of the *ummah*' as a whole (see, for example, Ahmad, 2004).

Those educated in the most elite English-medium private schools (Category C3), on the other hand, appear to encounter an entirely different notion of equality. Here, the terms of equality are not tied up with those of homogeneity, similarity, or conformity. Instead, the terms of 'equality' and those of 'diversity' are said to *coexist*. Different faiths, different interpretations of the same faith, different ethnicities, different languages, and so on, these become the components of an explicitly *equal* citizenship.

Throughout Pakistan, these competing approaches to the question of equality emerged in two basic forms. The first form was related to what might be described as an 'assimilationist' expression of equality that sought to move 'beyond diversity' (as it were) for the sake of the nation and, ultimately, for the sake of the *ummah* as a whole.

Equality I *e pluribus unum*: out of many, *one* Category B/C1/C2

But the second referred to an expression of equality in which the terms of 'diversity' were regarded as an important (even indispensable) religious and political norm.

Equality II *in uno plures*: in one, there are *many* Category C3

Of course, both approaches exist in Pakistan. But, as a general rule, the research presented here found that the first approach is far more common. In fact, far from tying the terms of equality to those of religious, sectarian, ethnic, or linguistic diversity, the terms of equality (in Pakistan) typically emerge as a persistent invitation to embrace the terms of one (monolithic) religious, and political, 'whole'.

A. Textbooks in Pakistan (Category B/C1/C2): 'Out of Many, One'

In their book, *The Subtle Subversion: Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan* (2004), A.H. Nayyar and Ahmed Salim draw special attention to this first face of equality (Equality I, above), both in the context of local government school curricula and in the context of three sets of textbooks: Islamic Studies, Pakistan Studies, and Urdu.

Ironically, for those with an interest in the question of religious education as it relates to the question of religious intolerance, the textbooks written for the course in Islamic Studies are considerably less interesting than those written for (a) the social sciences and (b) the humanities – for example, Pakistan Studies and Urdu. In fact, Pakistan Studies and Urdu deserve special attention, mostly because, as Nayyar and Salim point out, these are the subjects that begin to fuse the terms of *religion* with those of contemporary *politics*: 'religious' unity as a source of 'political' solidarity, 'religious' conformity as a source of 'national' harmony, and so on (Ahmad, 2004: 39).

As Nayyar and Salim explain, government-sanctioned Pakistan Studies textbooks for Classes I–V 'contain 4–5 chapters at the end [of each book] on "important personalities," and a majority of these . . . are religious personalities related to the early history of Islam'. In fact, they explain, 'these [religious personalities] ought to be (and usually are) a part of the book on Islamic Studies'. '[But] by including them here [in the Pakistan Studies textbook]', they note, 'all students, irrespective of their religion, are forced to learn Islamiat' (Nayyar & Salim, 2004: 54). As a matter of fact, turning away from the textbooks prepared for Pakistan Studies to those prepared for Urdu, they explain that 'over a quarter of the material in the books used to teach Urdu *as a language* is on one [and only one] religion' (Nayyar & Salim, 2004: vi). And of course, that religion is Islam: *e pluribus unum*/out of many, *one* (Table 4).

The issue, of course, is not that local government and private schools include a course entitled Islamic Studies as a mandatory course for all Muslim students. Nor is it that these government and private schools incorporate an explicit emphasis on Islam in the syllabus for Pakistan Studies. It is, rather that, in doing so, existing syllabi tend to conflate the terms of 'Islam' with those of 'citizenship'. And of course, even beyond this, the existing syllabi tend to conflate these categories in ways that specifically reduce the scope for legitimate expressions of religious, sectarian, ethnic, or linguistic diversity. *Religion itself*, if you will, becomes a proxy for a specific construction of *religious nationalism*. And, in due course, religious nationalism emerges as a relentless push for religious and sectarian *homogeneity*.

'It is a Muslim belief', notes the Pakistan Studies textbook used at the English-medium Army Public School in Rawalpindi (Class VIII), 'that the entire world is divided into two groups on the basis of faith'. On the one hand, the textbook explains, 'Muslims throughout the world constitute a

Table 4. Urdu textbooks (Punjab Textbook Board): Islamic content

Class	Lessons	% of the total
Class I	4 / 25	16
Class II	22 / 44	50
Class III	23 / 51	45
Class IV	10 / 45	22
Class V	7 / 34	21
Class VI	14 / 46	30
Class VII	16 / 53	30
Class VIII	15 / 46	33
Class IX–X	10 / 68	15
Average	13 / 46	28

Source: Nayyar & Salim (2004: 14, 54–59).

single nation with respect to their ideologies and beliefs'. And, of course, non-Muslims are exactly the same: 'All non-Muslims', declares the Pakistan Studies textbook used in Class X, 'constitute a single [undifferentiated] nation'.

B. Textbooks in Pakistan (Category C3): 'In One, There Are Many'

The treatment of religious difference, sectarian diversity, and political pluralism is, as Tariq Rahman (2004) pointed out, completely different in the most elite English-medium private schools (C3). In fact, even as the boys gathered on the manicured lawns of Lahore's elite Aitchison College are told that 'Muslims once prevailed over the world' because they were inspired to 'die in the way of Allah', these boys are *also* reminded that 'there shall be no compulsion in matters of religion' (Qur'an 2:256/Islamic Studies, Class VIII, Chapter 12).

Indeed, at Aitchison, lessons regarding the hospitality of the Prophet Mohammad vis-à-vis various non-Muslims are repeated again and again – first in Class VII (Islamic Studies) and then again in Class VIII, at which point students are also reminded that 'only persuasion and logic can be used to show [non-Muslims] ... that there is no God but Allah'. In fact, in Class X, the boys at Aitchison go on to encounter a special chapter devoted to the subject of 'relations with non-Muslims', reading that, 'in an Islamic state, religious tolerance is so highly regarded that, in safeguarding the rights of non-Muslims, the state [itself] ... permits the liberty of maintaining even those practices which are entirely opposed to Islam'. 'For example', their textbook explains, '[non-Muslims] have special permission from the state to manufacture or import alcohol'.

Even in the context of its unwavering commitment to the underlying values of Islam, the 'religion' curriculum in Pakistan's most elite English-medium private schools sees fit to explain that special provisions will remain in place to preserve the rights of many *different* people: *in uno plures*/in one, there are *many*.

There is, however, one expression of difference that appears to receive no attention at all, neither in the textbooks used by local government schools (Category B/C1/C2) nor in those used by the most elite private schools (Category C3). This aspect pertains to the question of sectarianism – by all accounts, the most important 'elephant in the living room' when it comes to the question of religious education in Pakistan. In fact, as Ali Shan Azhar explains in a recent report on local textbooks, 'controversial *sect-specific beliefs . . . find not a single mention in any textbook [of] any [sort] whatsoever*' (2007: 7). Not even the Pakistan Studies textbook, he writes, sees fit to mention sectarianism or sectarian violence as one of the key challenges confronting Pakistan.[7] Although the terms of religion are constantly invoked (across the curriculum), in other words, the terms of *sectarian difference* – indeed, the very possibility of anything even remotely resembling the possibility of difference *within* the specific terms of Islam – this is scarcely mentioned (for details, see Nelson, 2008).

Of course, few are inclined to believe that the specific nature of existing curricula (religious or non-religious) might be responsible for the scourge of sectarian conflict in Pakistan. On the contrary, most appear to insist that there is, in every sense, a fundamental disjuncture between (a) the terms of existing curricula, favouring *unity*, and (b) the logic of sectarian conflict, favouring *disagreement*, *division*, *debate*, *divergence*, and *dissent*.

There is, however, another assessment of existing curricula and their relationship with the scourge of sectarian conflict in Pakistan. In fact, this reading suggests that Pakistan's relentless push for 'unity' (within a single, monolithic, undifferentiated understanding of Islam) has created a situation in which each expression of 'difference', indeed, each expression of religious and sectarian 'diversity', is regarded with a specific sense of suspicion and, ultimately, a sense of acute *political* concern. Indeed, each expression of difference appears to be regarded as something resembling an intolerable 'insult' on at least two levels. On the one hand, for instance, expressions of religious disagreement appear to be regarded as a specifically *religious* insult – in effect, a direct assault on the unity of contemporary (transnational) Islam. And, yet, at the same time, these expressions emerge as a specifically *political* affront to the underlying terms of the state itself – in effect, an attack on the religious-cum-political solidarity associated with a strong and assertive Pakistan.

The problem of religious intolerance, in other words, emerges as a problem closely related to an understanding of religious doctrine in which the terms of

Islam itself are removed from any specific appreciation for religious, sectarian, ethnic, or linguistic diversity, not only in the context of local *madrasas*, but also (and increasingly) in the context of government and private schools. In fact, a closer look at existing curricula, even in the context of local government and private schools, reveals that the problem of religious *intolerance* in Pakistan – indeed, what amounts to Pakistan's almost unrelenting commitment to the task, or challenge, of religious-cum-political *assimilation* – is merely a specific extension of Pakistan's singular commitment to 'the first face of equality'.

Who Studies What? Bangladesh

It would, of course, be impossible to argue that Pakistan is unique in this regard – on the contrary, the first face of equality has emerged at the very centre of several (very different) expressions of assimilationist politics around the world. Having said this, it is important to keep in mind that the situation in Bangladesh is rather different. In fact, throughout Bangladesh, 'the first face of equality' does *not* seem to emerge at the expense of the 'second'. Instead, both faces seem to emerge in roughly equal measure (Table 5).

One might suspect that, given the enduring importance of government-sanctioned curricula in Bangladesh, local textbooks might be expected to exhibit many of the same characteristics as their counterparts in Pakistan. After all, the dominant textbooks in *both* countries appears to bear the burden of significant *state* control.

As it happens, however, this suspicion does not appear to be supported by the evidence. In fact, the content of existing government-sanctioned textbooks in Bangladesh is actually quite different. Whereas in Pakistan, for instance, the state appears to *reject* 'the second face' of equality (*in uno plures*) in favour of the first, the state in Bangladesh *does not*.

A. Who Studies What (Curriculum)? Bangladesh

Even a cursory glance at the national curriculum in Bangladesh is enough to reveal that Bangla-medium government schools (and Bangla-medium private schools) are comfortable with the terms of difference, diversity, and debate. Religion is of course a mandatory part of the curriculum in every Bangla-medium school. (In fact, religion is a mandatory part of the curriculum

Table 5. Competing expressions of equality (Bangladesh)

Equality I	*e pluribus unum*: out of many, one	Categories B *and* C
Equality II	*in uno plures*: in one, there are many	Categories B *and* C

in *every* formal school – Bangla and English-medium alike.) But, having said this, pluralism is never ignored. In fact, among the 22 'learning objectives' associated with a standard government-sector primary education in Bangladesh, as defined by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MOPME) (Government of Bangladesh, 2004: 38, 40), four appear to be directly related to this issue.

The national curriculum, for instance, begins with an expectation that every government school will seek 'to instil . . . an absolute trust and faith in [the] Almighty Allah so that [this faith will] work as a constant source of inspiration' for every thought and deed. And yet, having said this, the curriculum goes on to note that each child must be encouraged to develop 'moral qualities' through the cultivation of his or her *own* or '*respective*' religious instruction (emphasis added). In other words, the curriculum explains, different kinds of children must be expected to develop their own moral qualities in different kinds of ways: *in uno plures*/in one, there are *many*.

Even beyond this, however, the curriculum goes on to note that each school should seek 'to arouse in the mind of [each] learner a sense of love, respect, equality, fellow-feeling, and cooperation [for] all, *irrespective of nationality, religion, caste, or [gender]*'. And, finally, as if to drive this point home even further, the curriculum expects each child '[to] practise *tolerance [toward] others' opinions*' in order to cultivate an appreciation for 'democratic' norms and rules.

Clearly, 'the second face of equality' is not unfamiliar in Bangladesh. In fact, following on from these 22 'learning objectives', MOPME identifies what it calls 50 'terminal competencies'. And, here again, the link between religious education and the 'second face' of equality becomes almost impossible to ignore. First, children are expected to combine an 'absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah' (competency 1) so that they may remember to thank Him in all of their activities (competency 2). And, then, with this in mind, each student is expected to know about his or her *own* Holy Scriptures so that, in due course, he or she might acquire specific qualities of moral and personal character by following the instructions of his or her *own* religious tradition (competency 4). In addition, each student is expected to be aware of his or her own rights *and the rights of others* (competency 9), to *allow others to express their opinions while showing respect for these opinions* (competency 10), and, in due course, to develop *a liberal attitude towards the culture of various countries* in order to acquire an abiding appreciation for the spirit of world peace (competency 21).

Again, the point is clear. The unique status of Islam is simply taken for granted. But, at the same time, the terms of human diversity (including religious, sectarian, and ethnic diversity) are regarded as historically and politically indispensable.

B. Who Studies What (Curriculum)? Bangladesh v. Pakistan

In many ways, the differences between Pakistan and Bangladesh appear on at least two levels – one concerning the question of pluralism and one concerning the status of religion as 'a separate subject' within the curriculum as a whole.

First, it is important to reiterate the fact that, throughout Pakistan, the curriculum itself rarely allows for any mention of local differences – differences of religion, differences of religious interpretation, differences of race, ethnicity, language, or custom. In fact, throughout Pakistan, the curriculum scarcely begins to acknowledge even so much as the *possibility* of difference, noting that, in each local school, 'The Ideology of Pakistan' should be presented as 'an accepted reality' that is '*never subjected to discussion or dispute*'. In Bangladesh, however, students are encouraged 'to practise tolerance toward others' opinions' in order to cultivate an appreciation for 'democratic' norms and rules (Urdu Curriculum Classes I–V, 1995, quoted in Nayyar & Salim, 2004: 41; see also Urdu Curriculum Classes IV–V, 2002, quoted in Nayyar & Salim, 2004: 3; Government of Bangladesh, 2004: 38).

In Pakistan, the *Urdu* curriculum (2002, quoted in Nayyar & Salim, 2004: 11) urges teachers to cultivate an appreciation for the ways in which every student (Muslim and non-Muslim alike) is 'a member of a Muslim nation', noting that, 'in accordance with the Islamic tradition', each student should be 'honest, patriotic, and *janbaz mujahid* [that is, life-sacrificing in a specifically *religious* sense]'. In addition, each student is instructed to remember that '[the] national culture is not the local culture (or local customs)', but rather the culture and the principles laid down by the specific terms of 'Islam' (quoted in Nayyar & Salim, 2004: 12).

In Bangladesh, on the other hand, those enrolled in local government schools are told, on the very first page of their very first social science textbook (Class I) that 'all of us belong to one nation, and our nationality is Bangladeshi'. And, 'as a nation', they are told, 'we are all united'. And, yet, in Class III, government-sanctioned Bangla-medium textbooks go on to stress the fact that 'people of many different religions live in our country'. Muslims visit the 'mosque', Hindus visit the 'temple', Buddhists visit the 'pagoda', Christians the 'church', and so on (Class III NCTB Environmental [and Social] Studies Textbook: 9, 13).

As one respondent pointed out, the tone regarding religious minorities in Bangladesh is 'occasionally derogatory'. As a matter of fact, he noted, the tone often becomes somewhat patronising whenever the focus shifts away from the specific terms of Islam. Having said this, however, he went on to explain that the fact of diversity – indeed, *the fact of diversity as a fact of religious (and political) life* – is never ignored. On the contrary, even religious diversity is accepted as a common, and persistent, Bangladeshi 'national' norm.

Second, turning away from the question of religious diversity to the role of religion as 'a separate subject' within the curriculum as a whole, Nayyar and Salim (2004: 41) explain that the curriculum in Pakistan was designed 'in keeping with the philosophy ... of one particular school of Islamic thought', namely, that of the (modernist) Jama'at-e-Islami, which holds that every subject is, for all intents and purposes, an extension of religion. In fact, recalling the work of Syed Abul 'ala Maududi, the founder of the Jama'at-e-Islami, the provincial curricula for Classes I–V (1995, quoted in Nayyar & Salim, 2004: 10) clearly state that, across the board, 'no concept of [any] separation between the worldly and the religious [should] be given'. Instead, they explain, 'all the material [should] be presented from the Islamic point of view'.

In Bangladesh, however, the reach of the Jama'at-e-Islami appears to be somewhat less extensive – notwithstanding a similar history of (rather anaemic) electoral performance. To be sure, occasional references to Islam – Islam as the religion of the demographic majority, Islam as an important feature of the national culture, Islam as a marker of religious (or political) identity – are not uncommon in the textbooks of Bangladesh. But the history of Bangladesh (as a nation) is not presented as a singular 'Islamic' history. The Bangla language is not presented as an exclusively 'Islamic' language. And so on.

In Pakistan, the curriculum has been deliberately, and deeply, Islamised. The *Pakistan Studies* curriculum (2002, cited in Nayyar & Salim, 2004: 13), for instance, does not urge students to learn about the festivals enjoyed by local Hindus or Sikhs. Instead, it urges *all* students – Muslim and non-Muslim alike – to 'participate in *salat ba jamat*' (communal prayers)', to 'inculcate an unflinching love for Islam [and, thus,] a strong sense of national cohesion' (Nayyar & Salim, 2004: 31) and, at the same time, to develop an understanding of the ways in which 'all of the Muslims in the world belong to one community' (Nayyar & Salim, 2004: 27). And, of course, the *Urdu* curriculum (1995, quoted in Nayyar & Salim, 2004: 44, 13, 14) expects them 'to regard Islamic ways as the best of all', 'to be proud of the Islamic way of life' and, ultimately, to appreciate 'the unity of the Islamic world'. Unity, homogeneity, conformity, similarity, and consensus: *e pluribus unum*/out of many, *one*.

What Next?

Some insist that, over the course of the past 30 years, religious parties like the Jama'at-e-Islami have been at the forefront of a two-pronged attack on the existing educational landscape in South Asia (see Mercer *et al.*, 2005: 49). On the one hand, these groups are accused of seeking to bolster the study of Islam in the context of local government schools, bringing the terms of a modern 'religious' education into every 'non-religious' school. On the

other hand, however, these groups are often said to emerge at the cutting edge of existing *madrasa*-based reforms, seeking to ensure that local *madrasas* are modernised or 'mainstreamed' in ways that allow more time for the study of English, more time for the study of mathematics, more time for the study of chemistry, computer science, and so on (see Candland, 2005). But the Jama'at-e-Islami rarely shies away from these accusations. Instead, the Jama'at readily admits that both accusations are entirely correct.

Still, the goals of the Jama'at are not exceptional. In fact, like the Jama'at, many local parents have begun to crave a more coherent balance between the 'religious' and the 'non-religious' portions of their children's education. Indeed, many even go so far as to say that 'one system' providing 'both types' of education would amount to 'the perfect solution'. One system for *everyone* (rich, poor, etc.); one system for *everything* (religious, non-religious, and so on) (see Government of Pakistan, 2006: 16, 23).

In Bangladesh, one Jama'at-affiliated school in particular has rushed to the forefront of this understanding. This school is known as 'Manarat'. Its curriculum is pitched as a religious curriculum, its language of instruction is English, and its fee structure appears to lend prestige without, at the same time, becoming completely inaccessible. The textbooks, in turn, are drawn from several different parts of the world – history from the UK, science from Singapore, Islamiat from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. And, yet, insofar as the curriculum at Manarat attempts to strike a more effective balance between the 'religious' (R) and the 'non-religious' (NR) dimensions of a modern Muslim education, the emphasis is clearly, and consistently, on *religion*. At Manarat, religion is not treated as a separate subject. Instead, religion is treated as a comprehensive way of life. From Islamic Studies to biology, chemistry to civics, and Bangla to English, the emphasis is on religion.

Even insofar as the curriculum is focused on religion, however, the range of textbooks is completely different from those used in local *madrasas* – both *alia* and *qawmi madrasas*. And yet the range of textbooks is *also* completely different from those employed in local government schools. In fact, in many cases, the textbooks used at Manarat appear to resemble those found in other elite English-medium private schools – with one exception. This exception emerges in the case of Islamic Studies. At Manarat, neither the government-sanctioned

[A]	B	C1	C2	C3	**C4 Manarat**
maktab *madrasa* **mostly R**	government school mostly NR	private non-elite mostly NR	private non-elite mostly NR	private elite mostly NR	**private 'accessible' mostly R**

Figure 3. An expanded typology of schools in Bangladesh

Islamic Studies textbooks nor the series developed by Yasmeen Murshad (commonly used in local private schools) is ever used; instead, Manarat relies on a series drawn from several different parts of South Asia – from India, the series developed by Abidullah Al-Ansari Ghazi and Tasneem Khatun Ghazi (Class I, Class V, Class VIII); from Bangladesh, the work of Alhaj Mohammad Hossain (Class III); and, in its capstone course, a work from Pakistan, the work of Farkhanda Noor Mohammad (Class X).

Needless to say, the significance of this Jama'at-based model does not lie in the fact that it is, somehow, new or unique. On the contrary, similar schools have existed in other parts of the Muslim world for decades (see Damis, 1974). In fact, the significance of this model lies in a number of rather specific questions regarding its 'content' and, more specifically, for those with an interest in the future of religious education as this relates to the problem of religious and political intolerance, the status of this model vis-à-vis the competing faces of 'equality' mentioned above.

If the Manarat Model begins to embrace *the second face of equality* (Equality II) – not only in religious terms, but also (and perhaps more importantly) in sectarian terms – the replication of this model in other parts of the region could amount to a renewed appreciation for the politics of pluralism even *within* the specific terms of Islam. *If*, on the other hand, the Manarat Model appears to shun this second face of equality in favour of the *first* (Equality I), this model could emerge as a source of considerable intolerance – and, for those with an interest in the politics of pluralism, a source of some concern.

Conclusion

In December 2006, the Government of Pakistan issued a White Paper entitled, simply, 'Education in Pakistan'. This paper noted that, over the course of the last 50 years, the education system in Pakistan 'has not contributed to [the development of] a social psyche willing to listen to others'. Nor has it contributed to the creation of 'a tolerant society respectful of the beliefs [and] needs . . . of all' (see Government of Pakistan, 2006: 54). In fact, the paper noted, 'faith has degenerated into dogma' and, increasingly, 'a commitment to [religious] ideas has degenerated into obduracy' (see Government of Pakistan, 2006: 52).

With this in mind, the paper set out to clarify the trajectory of future reforms, focusing, specifically, on the 'religious' side of a modern 'non-religious' (government-sanctioned) education. In doing so, however, the paper merely reiterated many of the issues addressed in the context of this article. In particular, it drew attention to many of the lingering tensions, or points of friction, surrounding the 'two faces of equality' mentioned above.

Not surprisingly, the White Paper began with a reminder that, in Pakistan, 'the ideological base that governs the life of the majority is Islam'. And the

paper went on to note that, '[insofar as] Islam is the ideological base of Pakistani society … this ideology must determine the education policy [of the state as a whole]' (Government of Pakistan, 2006: 51).[8] At the same time, however, having recognised the enduring importance of Islam, the paper went out of its way to explain that 'Islam [itself] cannot continue to be treated as a static religious dogma thriving on ignorance and nostalgia' (Government of Pakistan, 2006: 3). On the contrary, the authors argued that, properly understood, the fundamentals of Islam encourage neither religious 'dogma' nor any form of intellectual or political 'stagnation'; they encourage, instead, what the paper – drawing on the philosophical work of Mohammad Allama Iqbal (1934) – referred to as a process of continuing 'interpretation' inspired by 'the spirit of *ijtehad*' (Government of Pakistan, 2006: 3; see also Iqbal, 1934).

Even as the paper sought to maintain a specific focus on the enduring importance of Islam the authors went out of their way to stress the need for a more progressive and dynamic education system – one that might begin to engage each student as a 'pro-active' thinker committed to certain 'moral values' while, at the same time, remaining 'open to new ideas', and 'able to tolerate (and value) differences of opinion, faith, and culture' (Government of Pakistan, 2006: 4). In effect, the authors argued, the focus of any future reform initiative must involve an effort to construct what might be called 'a religious-cum-political education' tied to 'the second face of equality' (Ibid.: 47).

Unfortunately, scholars and policy makers often disagree about the extent to which the terms of a modern 'religious' education should be joined to, or separated from, the terms of modern democratic 'citizenship' (see, for example, D.G.L., 1985; Sacken, 1988; McDonough, 1998). In fact, more often than not, this issue is treated as a simple choice: *separation* v. *non-separation*. In the context of Pakistan and Bangladesh, however, every indication seems to point to a third option as well – one that the White Paper issued by the Government of Pakistan consistently seemed to stress. This third option begins to move beyond the question of 'separation' towards the views of Mohammad Allama Iqbal, who, like Maududi, believed that the underlying terms of 'religion' could be used to *reinforce* the terms of modern (twentieth-century) 'citizenship'.

Whereas Maududi sought to tie the terms of 'non-separation' to the 'first face' of equality, however, Iqbal remained firmly committed, throughout his career, to the 'second: *in uno plures*/in one, there are *many*. In fact, in keeping with what might be described as a consistently 'democratic' reading of modern Muslim citizenship, Iqbal sought to fuse the terms of a modern *religious* education with an abiding appreciation for modern *democratic* pluralism.

In its recent White Paper, the Government of Pakistan (2006: 2) alludes to this alternative, sometimes quite explicitly. But the burden of the past is heavy, and, moving forward, any effort to replace the legacy of Maududi (*e pluribus unum*) with that of Iqbal (*in uno plures*) will require an enormous

effort.[9] The challenge, however, does not lie in avoiding (or eradicating) the 'religious' side of a modern 'non-religious' education. No, the challenge lies in looking for new ways to understand 'the second face of equality' *within* that religious education – not only in Pakistan, or Bangladesh, but around the world. Scholars like Iqbal have gone to great lengths to lead the way, providing scholars and policy makers with the language they need to proceed (see Iqbal, 1934; see also Rahman, 1982). It remains to be seen whether policy makers in Pakistan choose to take up this alternative.

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Notes

1. Some analysts insist upon excluding 'part-time' enrolments. 'In the first instance', noted the European Commission, 'exaggerated' enrolment figures will include 'not only those religious education institutions which cater to Grade 1–16 students, . . . but also the many thousands of *maktabs* attached to local mosques'. 'In the second instance', they explained, 'exaggerated' numbers will include 'not only full-time students who do not go to any other type of school, but also those students who [visit their local *maktab*] for only a couple of hours a day . . . and those who attend primary or secondary schools during the day [before proceeding] to their local *madrasa* in the evening' (see Mercer *et al.*, 2005: 35).
2. In Pakistan, our sample was strongly biased in favour of male respondents (94 per cent). But it was also strongly biased in favour of those with higher levels of education (intermediate education or above: 59 per cent). In fact, competing biases within our sample – for example, politically 'conservative' men v. politically 'progressive' educated elites – made for robust aggregate statistics that, nevertheless, require careful scrutiny.
3. As in Pakistan, the sample in Bangladesh was strongly biased in favour of male respondents (89 per cent). But it was also biased in favour of urban respondents and those with secondary and higher levels of education (33.5 per cent). The former tend to be somewhat more 'conservative' than the norm; the latter more 'progressive'.
4. Most of these schools are associated with the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC). In fact, even those *without* any such association still tend to follow the BRAC model, particularly when it comes to governance structures, teacher training, financial management, recruitment, curricula, and textbooks.
5. In Pakistan, each province is charged with the production of its own textbooks, but the content of these textbooks must be approved by the Curriculum Wing of the federal Ministry of Education in Islamabad (see Nayyar & Salim, 2004: 5; see also Government of Pakistan, 2006: 16, 18; and Government of Pakistan, 1976). In Bangladesh, public sector textbooks are approved by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) in Dhaka.

6. These conclusions emerge from (a) more than 1,000 interviews with local parents in Pakistan and Bangladesh, (b) a careful reading of several hundred local textbooks, (c) conversations with members of the Federal Ministry of Education (Curriculum Wing) in Islamabad, and (d) conversations with members of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) in Dhaka. Data collected in the context of these interviews have appeared in Nelson (2006, 2008). The data presented in this article were drawn from the 453 interviews mentioned above: Pakistan (N = 331); Bangladesh (N = 122).
7. While the Karbala episode leading to the martyrdom of Imam Hussain is 'frequently present[ed]', Azhar notes that this episode is never recounted with any specific reference to the emergence of Shi'ism or the present Sunni-Shi'a rift. And of course, he explains, 'the Ahmedi question . . . finds no favour whatsoever with any of the curriculum specialists.' It is, in fact, never mentioned (see Azhar, 7).
8. Among its list of Policy Recommendations, the White Paper notes that, 'between Classes I and V, it should be the purpose of [the] education [system] to inculcate in the child the Muslim value system' (Government of Pakistan, 2006: 53).
9. In many ways, the frustrations encountered by Professor Fazlur Rahman as Special Advisor for Education under President (General) Ayub Khan (1961–68) should serve as a telling indication of the challenges that lie ahead.

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